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Central Intelligence Agency

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Washington, D.C. 20505

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

5 June 1986

The OAS: New Venue for Contadora?

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Summary

With no regional treaty likely by the 6 June deadline, the possibility of shifting the talks to another venue, such as the OAS, has again been raised. At this juncture, however, neither the mediators nor the Central Americans--including Nicaragua--appear inclined as a group to scuttle the current negotiating framework. [redacted]

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[redacted] Nevertheless, at least several avenues exist to circumvent the apparent reluctance to shift mediation to the OAS. Once in the OAS the US may achieve some gains over the Contadora process--primarily a more direct ability to put pressure on Nicaragua--but at the same time would run the risk of becoming vulnerable to

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This memorandum was requested by the Director of Central Intelligence. It was prepared by [redacted] of the Central America South Branch, ALA. It was coordinated by the Directorate of Operations and the National Intelligence Officer for Latin America and contains information available as of 4 June 1986. Questions and comments are welcome and should be addressed to Chief, Middle America-Caribbean Division, ALA, [redacted]

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hemispheric pressure to make concessions that would favor Managua's interests. In any case, the OAS forum is likely to result in another prolonged mediation effort that could prove difficult to bring to closure. [REDACTED]

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Background

As prospects for achieving a regional peace agreement have periodically dimmed, participants in the Contadora process, primarily the mediators and the support group, have considered ceding responsibility for the negotiations to the OAS or the UN. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] To some extent, we believe the sentiment favoring a move to the OAS has been born of frustration, and has been employed by the mediators as a gambit to prod the Central American countries to compromise and facilitate agreement. [REDACTED]

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Current Sentiments

The likely failure to reach an accord by the self-imposed 6 June deadline has thus far not significantly heightened calls for shifting the mediation process to the OAS. In fact, signs of some compromise from Managua may have encouraged some participants to believe a partial solution may be found through the current mediation effort. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] the Guatemalan Foreign Minister stated publicly that "some" Central American countries opposed any OAS role. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] Only Honduran President Azcona has stated [REDACTED] in a recent speech at the OAS that he sees any role for the OAS in constraining Nicaragua, but he has not openly advocated shifting peace talks to the organization. [REDACTED]

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Nevertheless, assuming that the Contadora talks reach another deadlock soon, several mechanisms exist to circumvent this opposition and push the talks into the OAS even if Nicaragua opposes OAS involvement. One alternative would be to reconvene the 17th "Meeting of Consultation of Ministers of Foreign Affairs" first called--but never adjourned--in 1979 to discuss the Sandinista revolution. At that session, the anti-Somoza coalition--which included the Sandinistas--pledged to establish a government based upon

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political pluralism, a mixed economy, and a non-aligned foreign policy; the session was intentionally left open in order to allow the OAS to review periodically events in Managua. Given OAS rules, the session would have to be reconvened by the Foreign Minister from the Dominican Republic, who chaired the original meeting. []

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Several other possibilities also exist to transfer the talks to the OAS, including calling for a new Meeting of Consultation or appealing directly to the OAS Permanent Council. Any subsequent actions, however, including formulating an agenda to continue negotiation efforts, would have to be approved by a majority of the 31 member states. Marshalling the votes might prove difficult if potential supporters were concerned about appearing subservient to the US. []

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An OAS Mediation--The Net Balance

Within the OAS, there would some potential gains for US interests, as well as some potential additional difficulties. On the positive side:

- The US could better monitor the negotiating process.
- If a special mediating commission is appointed, the US could be positioned to influence the selection, possibly yielding a new group of mediators less inclined to accommodate Nicaraguan interests.
- If no special commission were established, the US could participate directly in the negotiating process, facilitating inclusion of tougher language on internal political reforms and more stringent verification mechanisms.
- The presence of the Core Four delegates in Washington would encourage more coordinated initiatives and discourage disunity. []
- The US would likely gain some allies among the conservative South American governments and countries of the English-speaking Caribbean, while Nicaragua would likely pick up few additional supporters beyond its current Contadora backers. []

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At the same time, a move to the OAS would shift the US role and could make the US position difficult in some ways:

- The US would run squarely into deeply held Latin American beliefs on non-intervention and peaceful settlement of disputes, which even our strongest allies would hesitate to abandon. As a result, they would be put in a difficult position if they are forced to take a stand on issues such as US aid to the insurgents.
- As a direct participant, Washington would be more vulnerable to Nicaraguan charges that the US is the real key to a solution and that direct US-Nicaraguan contacts should be encouraged.

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- Prolonged negotiations would reinforce the Sandinistas' lobbying efforts in the US to end assistance to the insurgents, and if aid is continued the Sandinistas would almost certainly call on the OAS to criticize the US.

On balance, a shift to the OAS would not likely result in any quick solution of the Nicaraguan problem, although there may be additional pressure on both Managua and the Core Four to reach an accord. Nevertheless, it is likely that the OAS forum will be as reluctant as the Contadora mediators to take harsh measures against Nicaragua, and the US runs the risk that its more direct and open involvement in the process will expose it to renewed pressure to end any intervention in Nicaragua and to reach an accommodation with the Sandinista regime.

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